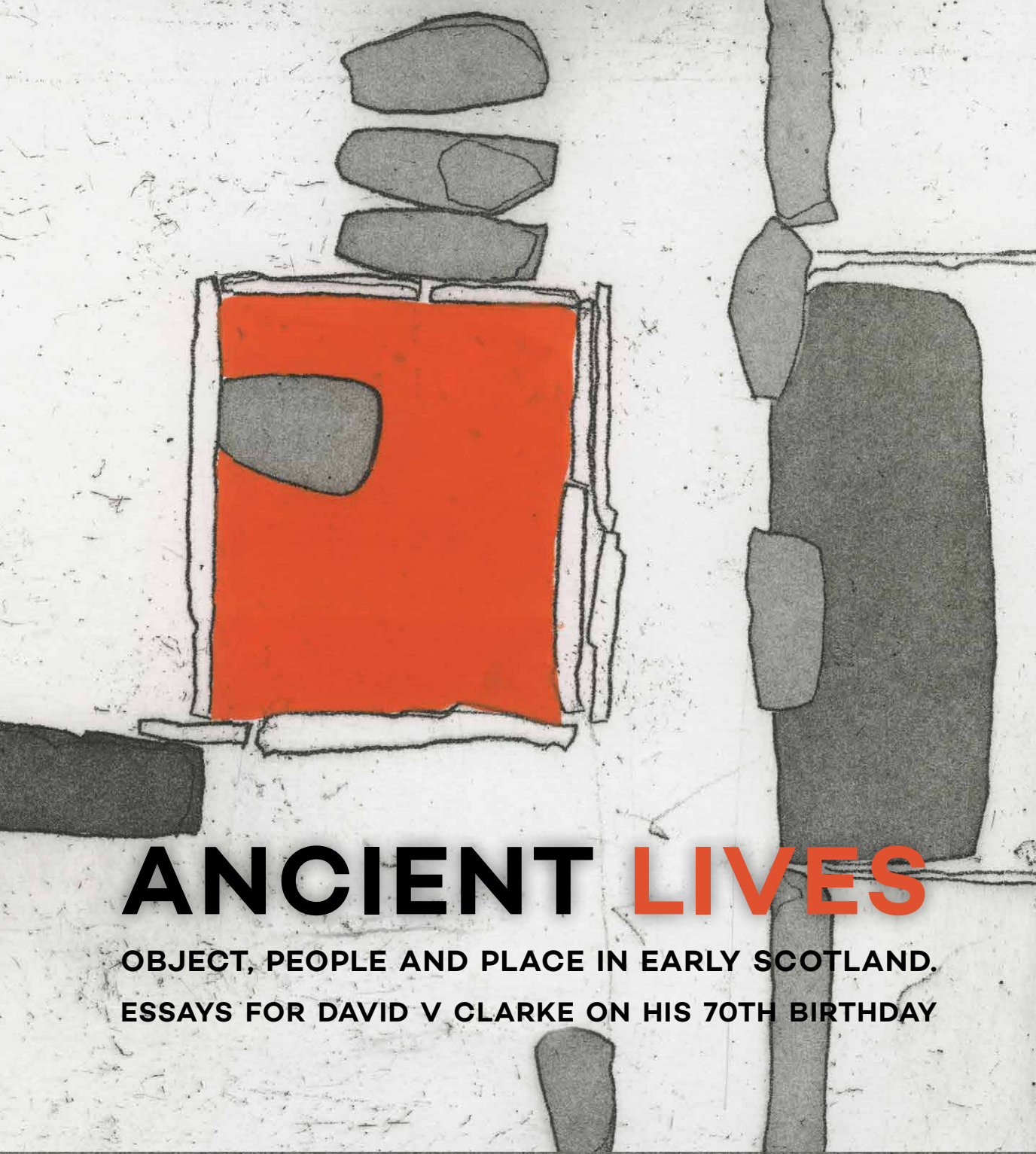

ANCIENT LIVES

OBJECT, PEOPLE AND PLACE IN EARLY SCOTLAND. ESSAYS FOR DAVID V CLARKE ON HIS 70TH BIRTHDAY

edited by

Fraser Hunter and Alison Sheridan

This is a digital offprint from:

Hunter, F. & A. Sheridan (eds) 2016: *Ancient Lives. Ojects, people and place in early Scotland. Essays for David V Clarke on his 70th birthday*. Leiden: Sidestone Press.

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Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden
www.sidestone.com

ISBN 978-90-8890-375-5

Lay-out & cover design: Sidestone Press

Cover picture: *House 1: Skara Brae*, by Philip Hughes
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Also available as:
e-book (PDF): ISBN 978-90-8890-376-2

Contents

Reading Govan Old: interpretative challenges and aspirations

Stephen T Driscoll

Abstract

This paper explores the conceptual and strategic issues raised during the transformation of Govan Old church into a heritage attraction and community cultural centre. This exceptionally important Gothic revival church houses the largest collection of early medieval sculpture that is not in state care in Scotland. The quality and depth of Govan's cultural assets and its historical traditions provide great interpretative opportunities, but come with great expectations. Govan is in the early stages of post-industrial urban regeneration and the church has been identified as its prime cultural resource. So the success of the transformation of Govan Old has the potential to have a significant influence on the future growth and prosperity of the community.

Keywords: *sculpture, British, Early Medieval, hogback, gravestones, churchyard*

David Clarke's affinity for Early Historic sculpture can probably be traced to two of his intellectual guides. His museum mentor, R B K Stevenson (O'Connor & Clarke 1983), was at heart an early medievalist who produced critical works about artefacts, field monuments, and perhaps most lastingly, about sculpture. His academic guide from Cardiff, Leslie Alcock, who also shared a close connection with Stevenson, redefined 'Dark Age' Scotland through a programme of excavations which stimulated David's late blossoming of interest in the Early Historic period (Clarke et al 2012). Of course he nurtured a prehistorian's interest in monumentality and an appreciation of the consequences of monuments being reused over a long time span. I detect an awareness of the multiple lives of prehistoric standing stones as far back as the 'Symbols of Power' exhibition, which incorporated images of impressive monuments alongside dazzling artefacts. This notion of conscious reuse was eventually articulated in an influential discussion of Pictish sculpture (Clarke et al 1985; Clarke 2007).

It is a pleasure to record my appreciation for David's contribution to Scottish archaeology: for my generation he has been the dominant intellectual figure in the Edinburgh establishment (although one suspects that he would prefer to be thought of as anti-establishment). As a young archaeologist making my way in the

world I found the critical atmosphere of the Café Royal an agreeable alternative to the seminar room. I have chosen to present these reflections on Govan for several reasons. Firstly, I know David is attracted to the unlikeliness of Govan as an ancient power centre, second Govan is richly endowed with monuments with 'multiple lives', and third these monuments present serious practical and conceptual challenges of interpretation and presentation. All of these will, I hope, make what follows of interest to him.

The challenge of Govan Old

Govan Old church (Fig 1) houses a unique collection of sculpture dating from the ninth to 11th centuries. Arguably this is the most significant single collection of Viking Age sculpture in Britain and Ireland, but it is little known outside the parish and a narrow specialist community. Since the middle of the last century the collection has been cherished and cared for by successive ministers and their congregations. However, in 2007 when the three Govan parishes were consolidated into one, the fragility of this curatorial arrangement was exposed. Despite Govan Old being the original ecclesiastical foundation, it was not selected as the seat of the amalgamated parish, a decision which raised questions about the future of the splendid Gothic-revival building and the long-term security of the sculpture collection.

While the historical significance of the Govan collection has long been known to some scholars, its potential value to the local community was scarcely recognised. I have been involved in recent efforts to draw on this potential in order not only to secure the future protection of the monuments, but also to transform Govan

Figure 1. View of Govan Old church, designed by James Smith in 1826

Old into a cultural resource for the community, the city and, indeed, the nation as a whole. This paper explores the key interpretative themes and challenges which have emerged through these initial efforts.

Govan itself is one of central Glasgow's more deprived districts: well off the tourist trail and with virtually no casual footfall, its most fundamental challenge is to attract visitors. However, the hidden quality of Govan Old church can be considered an asset in that for many people a visit provides a powerful sense of discovery, not to say wonder. What is this architectural masterpiece doing in Govan of all places? Why does it house this very large collection of ancient sculpture? How did the historic churchyard survive industrialisation? The answers to these and other questions are to be found in the material remains, which form the basis for a compelling multi-stranded story which begins with the earliest Christian activity on the Clyde and includes, in addition to the familiar story of industrial greatness, periods of royal patronage, commercial philanthropy, religious leadership and community-based social justice movements.

Although the Govan collection is substantial both in terms of numbers (44 known monuments, of which 31 survive) and the scale of the individual monuments, their presentation poses challenges, compounded by the fact that most of the sculpture dates to the late Viking Age (10th-11th centuries), a particularly obscure era in the west of Scotland. Although the collection consists of boldly executed pieces in the Celtic style, the passage of time has left its mark: many are broken or heavily worn and all require explanation if the lay visitor is to appreciate their significance and beauty. The majority of the collection consists of cross-inscribed slabs large enough to cover a grave, but there are also four free-standing crosses, none of which is complete. Only the famous sarcophagus has a self-evident function. The rest are not easy to 'read' visually; the ornamentation is mostly geometrical and the figurative representations are stylised to the point of abstraction.

Antiquarian background and contemporary scholarly context

There is ample evidence that the ancient sculpture was valued in the past, albeit in ways which inspired treatment which would be considered close to vandalism today. The first historical notice of the Govan sculpture is linked to the new church built in 1826 to a design prepared by parishioner James Smith. In gratitude for Smith's efforts the congregation presented him with the most visually arresting piece of Govan sculpture, the finely carved shaft of a freestanding cross now known as the 'Jordanhill Cross' as a result of its lengthy presence in the garden of his home, Jordanhill House (Davidson Kelly 1994, 15-16; illustrated in the garden by Macquarrie 2006, 3). This provides one indication of how the sculpture was valued at a particular moment in the antiquarian era. Inscriptions added in the 17th and 18th centuries to the majority of the surviving early medieval recumbent grave stones attest to their reuse as grave-markers for the leading landowners of the parish. Although defaced, this use ensured their preservation as the elite sought to display their status through the use of ancient monuments, providing an exceptional, unambiguous example of monuments with 'multiple lives' (Clarke 2007).

Govan Old has enjoyed ministers of high calibre over the centuries, a number of them learned men who were acutely aware of Govan's antiquity and its political importance within the medieval diocese of Glasgow, although it is only recently that its royal British origins have been understood (Davies 1994; Driscoll 1998; Broun 2004). The Reverend John Pollock (minister 1791-1820), for instance, in his contribution to the *Statistical Account* drew attention to the great artificial mound at Water Row, known as the 'Doomster Hill', which in the distant past had served as an open air law court (Pollock 1795, 294; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 40-1). His successor Rev Matthew Leishman (1821-74) was particularly sensitive to Govan's heritage, having witnessed the initial stages of industrial expansion and its impact on archaeological remains. His description of the excavation of the Doomster Hill by the local dye works, which revealed bones and wood at its core, displays an awareness of the vulnerability of the monument (1845, 690; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 40-1). Leishman was also attuned to the power of the stones: his decision to use the Jordanhill Cross as a prestigious token of gratitude confirmed its antiquarian value. He also witnessed the sensational discovery of the sarcophagus in 1855, which brought the Govan sculpture to the attention of a national (scholarly) audience via John Stuart's *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (Fig 2; Stuart 1856, 43, plates 134-7).

It was not until 1899, however, when Govan was at the peak of its industrial phase of greatness, that a complete record of the collection was made (Fig 3). This was initiated by Sir John Stirling Maxwell, MP of Nether Pollok, who commissioned Thomas Annan to make a photographic record and plotted the location of the stones within the churchyard where they were still marking burials. This slim but lavish volume not only made pioneering use of photography, but constituted a distinct civic statement about the antiquity of the burgeoning industrial powerhouse on Glasgow's south-west periphery. So effective were Annan's carefully lit photographs, made in the studio from plaster casts (Fig 4), that they were

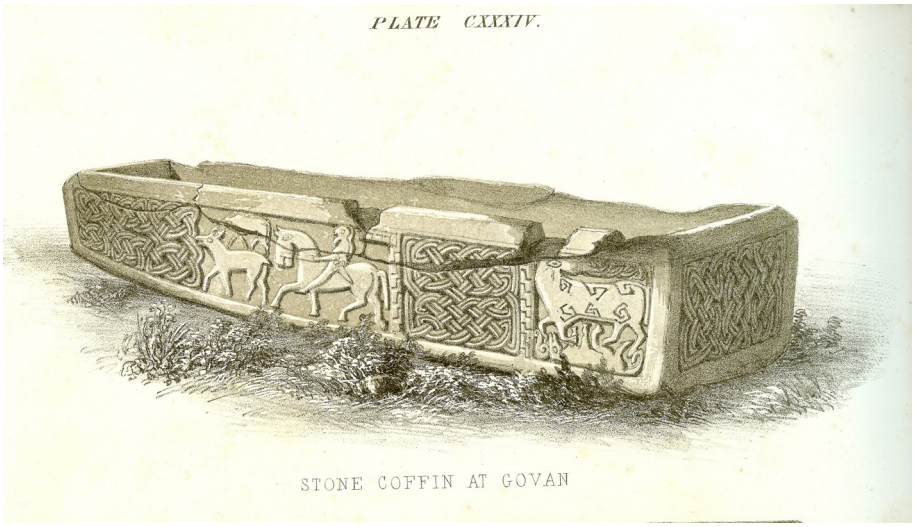

Figure 2. Lithograph of the sarcophagus, from The Sculptured Stones of Scotland *(Stuart 1856, plate 134)*

recycled in Allen and Andersons's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903, 451-75) with very limited additional comment. As the 20th century progressed and the shipbuilding declined, Govan's sculpture slipped into obscurity, despite the promotional efforts of T C Brotchie (1938), director of the Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery and a tireless Govan-booster, who engineered the return of the Jordanhill Cross to Govan in 1928. Until C A Ralegh Radford's reconsideration of the Govan sculpture (1967a, 1967b) the stones remained obscure local treasures. His was the first sustained scholarly discussion to consider the whole collection and it was he who coined the term 'Govan School' to refer to its makers, but in spite of this they remained largely unknown. In the late 1970s it was possible for the Anglo-Saxon historian Patrick Wormald to astonish his friend Michael Wood (then a PhD student researching Viking Age England) by bringing him to Govan Old via the Underground without prior warning of the scale or magnificence of the collection. Wood recounted this revelatory experience when he featured Govan in his 2012 BBC series 'The Great British Story: a People's History'.

Although Radford rekindled limited academic interest in Govan's antiquity, the most significant advance of the modern era can be linked to the ministry of Tom Davidson Kelly (1989-2002), who saw the sculpture as a spiritual as well as cultural resource. Davidson Kelly reasoned that by promoting Govan's historical significance he could enhance the self-esteem of Govanites in the depressed post-industrial era. Using antiquities to further a ministerial agenda had, of course, been pioneered by one of his predecessors, George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community (Ferguson 2001), while Davidson Kelly's concern for community social justice followed the tradition of another of his predecessors David Orr, champion

Figure 3. Photograph of Govan churchyard in the 1890s showing a hogback in situ. Source: Wylie Collection, University of Glasgow Library

Figure 4. Photograph of a cast of the Jordanhill Cross taken by Thomas Annan (Stirling Maxwell 1899)

Figure 5. Tom Davidson Kelly and the author discuss the Govan sarcophagus with the Govan MSP Nicola Sturgeon. Source: Govan Workspace

of the Govan Housing Association (Young 2003, 2012; see below). To promote awareness of the sculpture Davidson Kelly established the Friends of Govan Old and persuaded a group of distinguished scholars to direct their expertise to consider *Govan and its Early Medieval Sculpture* at an influential conference in 1992. The subsequent publication surveyed archaeological, artistic and historical aspects and established the importance of the collection to a wider scholarly audience than ever before (Ritchie 1994). Building upon this, the Friends of Govan Old have made the collection more publically accessible by publishing guidebooks, coordinating volunteer guides, and hosting events including a successful annual lecture series. Tom Davidson Kelly was also responsible for initiating archaeological investigations at Govan Old, first by Colleen Batey (see Ritchie 1994) and subsequently by myself. The Govan sculpture was introduced to an international audience in 1989 when a fibreglass cast of the panels was included as part of the British Museum/ National Museums of Scotland (as then-named) exhibition entitled *'The Work of Angels': masterpieces of Celtic metalwork 6th–9th centuries AD*.

These exploratory excavations of 1994-6 established that the heart-shaped churchyard enclosed one of the oldest Christian sites in Scotland and exposed the key features of the Strathclyde royal site (Driscoll 2003; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 35-40). Two burials outside the south-eastern corner of the church, dated to the fifth-sixth centuries, are thought to be Christian from their orientation. Various deposits dated to the eighth-ninth century provided evidence for industrial activity and a buried road surface in the south-east of the churchyard. The excavations also revealed that the curvilinear 'Celtic' churchyard was originally enclosed by a massive ditch and bank which was silting up by the ninth-tenth century, when the sculpture began to be carved. It was recognised that the buried road led towards the Doomster Hill which suggested that there was a link between the 'royal' burial ground, the court hill and the royal residence across the Clyde in Partick; in short, the framework for the political capital of Strathclyde. Above all, these excavations established the national importance of Govan Old and the integrity and coherence of the churchyard's archaeology, and led to its designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument by Historic Scotland (Owen & Driscoll 2011).

While interest in and awareness of Govan Old's historic importance was growing at the end of the 20th century, church attendance was diminishing. By 2007 this had reached a critical level and it was decided to amalgamate the three congregations – Govan Old, 'Govan New' (St Mary's at Govan Cross, the former Free Kirk) and Linthouse. In that year a Church of Scotland arbitration panel determined that the united parish of Govan and Linthouse would be housed at 'Govan New'. The controversial decision to abandon the original ecclesiastical centre shocked both members of the congregation and interested observers, not least because it raised concerns over the future of the sculpture and the architecturally significant church. In the short-term, the prospect of an unoccupied church was alarming, such buildings being highly vulnerable to vandalism. In the longer term there was a widespread perception that without Govan Old at its cultural and social heart, Govan would lose an invaluable community resource, one capable of stimulating heritage-based urban regeneration. These concerns quickly galvanized a consortium of interested parties to consider how best to fashion a sustainable

future for Govan Old. Following discussions with heritage bodies and consultation with local decision-makers an Options Appraisal study was undertaken in 2008 by Govan Workspace Ltd, a local regeneration agency (Fig 5).

The Options Appraisal study argued that the long-term interests for the regeneration of central Govan depended upon a healthy Govan Old and identified the sculpture as a major community resource, access to which should be improved as part of a strategy to develop a sustainable future for the church building (Cassidy 2010). Govan Workspace Ltd took the lead in applying to a range of funding bodies including Historic Scotland, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Church of Scotland to redisplay the sculpture. The funding for this interim redisplay was secured in 2011, allowing Northlight Heritage/York Archaeological Trust to undertake the 'Govan Stones Project', its aim to make the collection more accessible, more visually appealing, more intelligible and, above all, better known. The resulting redisplay, 'The Govan Stones', opened by the then-Deputy First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon in July 2013, is seen as the initial stage in the process of transforming Govan Old into a viable cultural centre for Govan. The success of the project has stimulated Glasgow City Council to make improvements to the churchyard environs and commission a churchyard conservation management plan (Buckham 2013). The final stage of the redevelopment of Govan Old, which will involve the reconfiguration of the church for a permanent display and to house commercial tenants, requires a major capital injection. During the period of the Heritage Lottery Fund-funded project visitor numbers increased fourfold to over 8000 per annum and a new body, the Govan Heritage Trust, has assumed ownership of the church building. This success in attracting visitors and the change in ownership have allowed the Heritage Lottery Fund to make the necessary capital investment as part of the second phase of the Govan Townscape Heritage Initiative (planned for 2017).

The setting of Govan Old

Govan is located on the south side of the Clyde opposite the mouth of the River Kelvin, where the configuration of the two rivers made this a convenient natural crossing point which, prior to the dredging of the Clyde, could be forded at low tide. This remained an important ferry crossing until 1963 when the opening of the Clyde Tunnel rendered it redundant. The settlement occupies a low-lying and fertile tract of ground which prior to industrialisation was recognised as being one of the most productive stretches of the Clyde. As Glasgow expanded and prospered through its participation in the Atlantic trade, the small village of Govan acquired riverside villas and a reputation as a rural idyll, complete with picturesque country church (Fig 1; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 21-7, 51-79).

Handloom weaving was Govan's original industry and by the 18th century its success had transformed the old hamlet into two lanes of thatched cottages straggling over a kilometre upstream from the ferry crossing. From the end of the 18th century this cottage industry began to be displaced by textile factories, which from the 1860s were in turn replaced by shipbuilding yards (Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 81-6). Although the Clyde here was narrow and shallow, the local

availability of iron, engineering expertise and cheap labour placed Govan at the centre of what became a global shipbuilding industry. One consequence of this was that the river itself was industrialised: deepened, straightened, and revetted with stone to cope with intense traffic. Another consequence was that Govan's population grew exponentially: the rural parish of 1793 had a population of 2518; a little over a century later in 1910, two years before its annexation by the Glasgow Corporation, it had risen to 89,725, a 45-fold increase (Maver 2000, 98). The material evidence of these industrial changes remains the defining physical characteristic of Govan today. Sheer embankments restrict access to the riverside and the legacies of shipbuilding occupy much of the waterfront still. The historic townscape of tenements is punctuated by public buildings which reflect the high level of prosperity and philanthropy of the late 19th century – Govan has the third highest density of listed buildings in Glasgow after the City Centre and the West End. Conspicuous amongst these distinguished buildings are Govan Old Church, Robert Rowand Anderson's Gothic revival masterpiece (1888), and his adjacent essay in Scottish Baronialism, the Pearce Institute (1904), endowed in memory of William Pearce, owner of the Fairfield shipyard, to serve as a social and educational centre and to provide offices for the church. Together these two buildings provide a social and spiritual core for Govan and, despite the construction of Govan Town Hall (1897-1901) elsewhere, they remain the geographical and institutional heart of Govan.

Rowand Anderson's church confounds the Presbyterian stereotype. It is lavishly detailed and organised like a medieval church with a distinct nave, chancel and side chapels and an extensive cycle of stained glass. Built during the ministry of Rev John Macleod (1875-98) which spanned the period of rapid population expansion, it became known as the 'People's Cathedral' because of its grand scale and is now recognised as one of the most influential Gothic Revival church buildings in Scotland. This new church incorporated a suitable place for the sarcophagus, which was brought inside to stand on a stone table designed by Anderson himself in 1905. It was another two decades before most of the rest of the sculpture was brought within the church in 1926 and mounted with wrought iron brackets fashioned by local craftsmen. The last stones remaining outside were brought in during the ministry of Tom Davidson Kelly.

In addition to protecting the stones, bringing the sculpture inside the church allowed Govan Old to assert its local importance through the display and curation of these antiquities. In this respect the bulky presence of the hogbacks served as the most forceful symbol of the church's ancient origins. While the organic display of the stones that evolved in the 20th century had a homespun charm and exhibited a genuine regard for the monuments, arguably it was primarily addressed to other members of the Church of Scotland rather than the public at large. When the stones were brought inside Govan Old was a thriving church, not a museum, so there was no interpretative display and explanation was communicated by word of mouth. Latterly the Friends of Govan Old changed all this; they trained volunteer guides and published guides, but the crisis of 2007 brought home the need to improve the presentation of the sculpture and to address a wider audience.

Interpretative themes

From an archaeological point of view the most obvious interpretative themes relate to the Kingdom of Strathclyde. Being short-lived and obscure, few are aware that it was the last independent British kingdom in these isles (Broun 2004; Clarkson 2010). This obscurity creates an air of mystery, and learning about Strathclyde gives the visitor a sense of new discovery. Even fewer people are aware that in the 10th and 11th centuries, the seat of this kingdom was in Govan, where there was a royal burial ground and open-air court site (the Doomster Hill) and that in Partick, on the north shore but still within the parish, was a royal residence. The sculpture is critical to recognising Govan's royal status; no place in Britain has a larger or more imposing assemblage dating to this period. Despite its imposing scale, understanding the collection requires a great deal of explanation to draw out its significance. For instance, the most magnificent piece, the monolithic sarcophagus (Fig 6), is without close parallel in Britain, and it is only through close consideration of Scottish dynastic histories and wider British trends in patterns of the culting of royal martyrs that it has been possible to identify for whom it was made. John R Davies has argued convincingly that it was fashioned to hold the corporeal remains of Constantine I 'the Martyr', king of the Picts and son of Cinead mac Alpìn, who died in 876 fighting Vikings (Davies 2010). The full-body size of the sarcophagus and the possible drain hole are taken to indicate that it

Figure 6. The Govan Sarcophagus as displayed in the chancel. Source: Northlight Heritage

was made not long after his death. Clearly the general public cannot be expected to have much prior knowledge of this material, nor is it clear how much appetite there is for such fine-grained detail or how best to deliver it.

The five hogback grave stones are perhaps the most familiar of Govan's monuments. They constitute the most numerous group of hogbacks in Scotland and include the largest examples known anywhere. Together these massive carvings of buildings protected by dragon-like beasts are an imposing and perplexing group. Traditionally hogbacks are regarded as Viking colonial monuments and there has been a tendency to regard these as the earliest of the Govan sculptures, although this has been called into question by Davies' dating of the sarcophagus to the late ninth century (Lang 1974; 1994; Davies 2010). Recent research has emphasised the longevity of the hogback monument type (Ritchie 2004). The redisplay of the stones now allows this evolution to be better appreciated. Two of the hogbacks have been reworked by cutting away portions to allow new, more up-to-date carving to be introduced, changes that Ritchie argued occurred within a few generations of their original execution (2004, 15). This intriguing evidence for 'multiple lives' should be considered alongside a more dramatic development from the simplest of the hogbacks (which might be interpreted as a 'chieftain's hall') to the most complex and arguably latest (which appears to be modelled on a church-shaped reliquary shrine). Such a development from a 'secular' to a more 'ecclesiastical' monument would be consistent with an increasingly institutionalised kingship in this period in which the church played an influential role. Interesting though these transformations and their implications for early medieval social and political development might be, we need to question how meaningful such topics are for contemporary visitors and for the Govan community. The potential to alienate and exclude the non-specialist audience would seem to be quite high.

For many local people, the dominant ideas at Govan Old church relate to it as a centre of reformed worship which has contributed significantly to the development of the Church of Scotland. This goes back to the earliest days of the Presbyterian church in the 16th century, when Andrew Melville was the minister (1577-80). Govan played a central role in securing the social position of the new church: the first four reformed ministers (1577-1622) were also principals of the University of Glasgow (Reid 2012). However, little physical evidence survives from this era, apart from the inscriptions dating from the 16th-19th centuries on the recumbent grave stones which emphasise a continued interest in and reverence for the monuments in their continued use as burial or lair markers. Again, we might wonder in this epoch of diminishing church membership how best to articulate and animate these strands of the Govan story: perhaps by drawing connections with historic social upheavals and with the modern church mission.

Without doubt Govan's industrial history is the most immediately accessible aspect of the past to the local community and contemporary visitors, but despite the imprint of shipbuilding on the fabric of Govan, the industrial past cannot be equated simply with ships. Before the arrival of heavy engineering, Govan was known as a centre of weaving. In modern times the Govan Weaver's Society has become purely a philanthropic and social organisation, but it was founded in 1756 to protect the interests of the independent weavers in a volatile economic

environment (McNab 2006). This cottage-based industry encouraged the development of bleaching and dying, the most important of which was Reid's Dye Works at Water Row. These industrial buildings transformed the centre of Govan from around 1822 and radically altered the landscape by obscuring the Doomster Hill (Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 61-2). The church ceased to be the dominant structure in the village. The transformation from a rural farming community to a commercial manufacturing one is documented in the churchyard. New forms of monument appear from the late 17th century associated with the new trades – most frequently represented are the weavers. These new monuments take the form of upright headstones, distinguished by their classical architectural detailing, their post-Reformation *memento mori* imagery, by the use of trade symbols and by their verticality. Visually they are distinct from the earlier gravestones – the horizontal ledger stones and reused Early Medieval recumbent cross-slabs which continued to be favoured by the local gentry into the 19th century. Taken as a group the old and new stones reveal that the churchyard was a social arena where different groups asserted identity by erecting challenging monumental forms. The notion of social tension between different classes and occupations is a theme which has contemporary resonance and creates a genuine link between the distant past and recent times. Unfortunately, the rehousing of the medieval stones indoors has made it harder to appreciate the interplay of these contrasting monuments. It is hoped in the long term to place replicas of the early medieval stones in a restored churchyard, allowing this connection to be re-established.

In post-medieval times the Church was the social centre of the community par excellence: it provided spiritual support, moral guidance, education and poor relief. As the population grew new 'daughter' churches were established to cater for Gaelic-speakers and non-conformist sects. This proliferation was exacerbated by the Great Disruption of 1843 which split the Church of Scotland. Despite this, membership of the Church continued to grow rapidly and in response the parish of Govan was subdivided into numerous smaller parishes, eventually numbering over 30 daughter parishes – the most to be generated by a single parish anywhere in Scotland (Davidson Kelly 2007). This period of expansion is most strongly associated with John Macleod, who personally established 13 daughter churches within the ancient parish. Funds intended to finance a colossal spire for Rowand Anderson's church were diverted to this missionary activity of Macleod's, with the result that following his untimely death the spire was never completed (MacFarlane 1965, 50-1).

Following the First World War demand for ships declined. The slump deepened during the Great Depression, creating misery and deprivation for many working in shipbuilding and related industries. That crisis inspired an extraordinary response from the incumbent minister Rev George MacLeod (1930-8) who sought to make the Church of Scotland more relevant to local communities by engaging in practical tasks to improve living conditions. In the context of the churchyard, the most conspicuous was the creation of a memorial garden between the Pearce Institute and the entrance to the churchyard which featured a replica of the Jordanhill cross (its head restored on the model of the Barochan Cross: Fig 7). MacLeod followed this with a scheme to restore the ruined Iona Abbey as a means of bringing together

Figure 7. The replica of the Jordanhill Cross modelled on the Barochan Cross, erected in 1933 as a feature of the memorial garden. Photograph by Stephen Driscoll

trainee ministers and ordinary working men. Out of this inspired initiative grew the Iona Community, which remains a thriving social justice organisation with an international membership but retaining a particular commitment to Scotland: it celebrated its 75th anniversary in Govan Old in 2013.

The radical social justice agenda established by George MacLeod inspired a succession of Govan Old ministers, most notably David Orr (1960-80), who was instrumental in establishing the New Govan Society, an organisation dedicated to improving living conditions for Govan's disadvantaged (Young 2003). These efforts to alleviate poverty led to the establishment of the Govan Housing Association (1971), which worked alongside and sought to empower the local community, becoming the model for the Scottish Housing Association movement which has done some much to improve people's lives across Scotland. The prominence of Christianity in the narrative of modern Govan is easily overlooked, but it remains influential and alive. One of the most remarkable survivals of John Macleod's ministry is the daily service – unusual for the Church of Scotland – which has continued unbroken since 1888 when the existing church was opened.

Conceptual and pragmatic challenges

Leaving to one side the very real financial and organisational challenges to presenting the churchyard at Govan Old, there remain several obstacles to overcome in successfully interpreting the place. The overarching challenge is that in its current and developed form Govan Old is fundamentally a rural churchyard, albeit one embedded within a dense urban townscape. Over the course of the 19th century the open aspect of the churchyard was gradually closed down. The

process accelerated in the 20th century when the Pearce Institute was built (1904) and shortly thereafter the Harland and Woolf (1912) plating shed was erected on its eastern boundary. Tenements to the north and west effectively surrounded the churchyard. In recent years most of these large buildings have come down, but the urban setting remains dominant. The layout of the churchyard is loose and organic. Its loose character is formed by the early division of the cemetery into lairs, the boundaries of which are documented in detail in an 1809 plan by Thomas Kyle, and many remain visible. The structural looseness has been exacerbated by the removal of the ancient stones into the church and by considerable attrition to the later monuments over the years, not least through vandalism.

An associated challenge is that the churchyard has limited connection with the existing community as a place of burial and remembrance. The cemetery ceased to be used actively in the mid-19th century (Buckham 2013) and such has been the population mobility in the past century that there are few, if any, residents of Govan now who have family connections to those buried in the cemetery. Re-establishing connections with the community presents a major obstacle to the active and respectful usage of the site. One means of reconnecting with the community is to find alternative uses; perhaps cultural activities offer the most attractive way of constructing a new social presence. By drawing upon the existing qualities of the sculpture, architecture and ecclesiastical tradition it should be possible to enhance and invigorate the quality of the place. Because Govan Old is Church of Scotland and the majority of Govanites (if religious) identify with Catholicism establishing a spiritual connection is not straightforward; the majority are ignorant of Govan Old's historical and cultural significance. Sectarian hostility threatens to obscures wider interest in the church despite the high Presbyterian aesthetic of the building which makes it seem familiar to those raised in either a Catholic or an Anglican tradition. In this respect the decline in active churchgoing is perhaps a benefit for Govan Old as people become less subject to sectarian prejudices and more accustomed to new immigrants and asylum seekers. In time this problem may evaporate, but in the short term it needs to be addressed by adopting an ecumenical approach and emphasising the site's ancient (pre-Reformation) origins and the powerful social justice legacy. The fact that Govan Old is also no longer the centre of the Christian parish may contribute to making it seem less threatening to some. The transfer of ownership to the Govan Heritage Trust brings an additional benefit: secular ownership of the cultural assets opens up new sources of public funding such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Finally, while in an increasingly secular society there is general decline in interest in churchgoing, ironically there is healthy interest in churches as wedding venues and settings for entertainment, an interest which has been of significant financial value to numerous historic churches elsewhere in Glasgow (eg St Andrews in the Square, Cottiers, Oràn Mor and Queen's Cross).

Towards a sustainable future

Although the Govan Stones redisplay project was intended to raise the site's profile and attract visitors, it is not expected that tourism alone can sustain a building of this scale, nor would it be desirable to be dependent on external resources. The sympathetic display of Govan's cultural heritage has the potential to reshape public perceptions, but the museum approach will not be sufficient; other activities and funding sources are necessary if it is to contribute to shaping the centre of a new Govan. The Govan Stones project was conceived of as a preliminary stage to a more ambitious and complex redevelopment of the building, which would include a high-quality 'permanent' redisplay of the sculpture (Fig 8). The proximity of the new Riverside Museum connected to Govan by a seasonal ferry, and the shipbuilding display in the refurbished Fairfield Shipyard offices, establish Govan Old as a viable heritage destination. However, it is hard to imagine that heritage interest could generate sufficient income to sustain the building, so central to the redevelopment strategy is the reconfiguration of the internal space to provide lettable space for a commercial tenant, ideally a social enterprise with cultural or religious connections to Govan Old. As well as creating commercial facilities, it is intended to maintain the church as an active centre of worship. This last feature will, it is hoped, keep the building alive and protect it from becoming a 'dead' museum or a glossy backdrop. In this long-term vision, Govan Old would serve as an anchor for community regeneration by providing a cultural as well as a spiritual focus and it would project an unexpected, positive account of Govan's distinctive contribution to Scottish identity.

Figure 8. View of the nave from the Govan Stones reception area with the repositioned Jordanhill Cross in the foreground. Source: courtesy of Tom Manley

The academic instinct is to think of the permanent redisplay in scholarly terms, but this would be misguided. On the one hand, Early Historic Scotland is obscure and difficult to understand, few people have heard of the Kingdom of Strathclyde, and the precise relationship between the sculpture and the historic narrative is uncertain and debatable. On the other hand, the monuments have massive material presence which conveys a powerful sense of authority. The artistic details of form, decorative motif, and figural imagery provide an authentic vehicle to explore ideas about belief, cultural identity and destiny. This is a story which did not stop in the 12th century; although royal patronage moved elsewhere, Govan remained a place of regional importance through the Middle Ages into the Reformation era. The sculpture is central to this argument too because the prominent inscriptions from the 17th-19th centuries reveal that the stones retained their value over the centuries. This biographical approach to the monuments is particularly important because it allows the discussion and interpretation to extend out into the churchyard where a dynamic interplay can be observed between different monument types. This interplay reflects economic and social developments of modernity as the new (post-medieval) monument forms, with their classical motifs, trade symbols and spiritual message, effectively convey the changes of world view which accompanied the Reformation. This idea of continuous religious activity is also critical because the modern ministry has been important for shaping post-industrial Govan and, through the Iona Community, has also been central to notions of social justice which are characteristic of modern Scotland.

To serve as a genuine community asset, Govan Old will have to be more than economically self-sufficient, it will have to generate and nurture community activities. To a large extent this will depend upon how people respond to the reconfigured building. By emphasising the artistic legacy it may be possible to build upon existing interest from the local artistic community. By retaining the living community of worship it is hoped to keep the building spiritually alive.

In some ways, the natural features of the churchyard provide its most appealing quality, of the site as an oasis of secluded green in the centre of the city. The area is unique within Govan, where green spaces are widely separated by gritty post-industrial urban townscapes. Elder Park, the largest park, is open and highly public, and therefore not conducive to reflective activities, while other green spaces are closely linked to domestic housing and again not natural repositories of calm. In contrast Govan Old, being set back from the road, is surprisingly secluded, making it ideal for contemplation or, unfortunately, al fresco boozing. Naturally the church itself is suited to reflection, but the ancient churchyard is more accessible to a wider section of the community. By improving the condition of the churchyard, by enhancing its approaches and by discouraging anti-social behaviour it can be reclaimed by the community.

Looking beyond the banks of the Clyde, Govan has the potential to serve as a portal to other places of early Christian significance. There already exists a palpable link between Govan Old and Iona through the effort of George MacLeod

and successive leaders of the Iona Community. The great internal space of the nave could easily accommodate more examples of early Christian monuments, perhaps utilising casts of the major monuments currently in storage in various museums across the country. Properly displayed, these casts could serve both as a place to celebrate the unique Scottish contribution to medieval sculpture and as an orientation centre for ecclesiastical tourists.

Govan Old has an important contribution to make to redefining Scottish identity. Cultural sophistication and antiquity are unexpected attributes of Govan; the most obscure of the early peoples of Scotland, the northern Britons, had their virtually unknown royal centre at Govan; the legacy of this obscurity and mystery is a remarkable collection of sculpture which being located in a city (with its own underground station) is far more accessible than the Celtic crosses of Iona, the symbol stones of the Picts or the St Andrews' sarcophagus. Placing Govan at the centre of that arguably serves to redefine Scottishness.

Throughout this essay the intellectual debt to the concept of 'multiple lives' (Clarke 2007) is obvious. I was initially inspired to think of how this idea could inform understanding of the sculpture and thereby make it more engaging for the visitor; the initial results of this can be seen in the Govan Stones redisplay. Further thinking about the pragmatic issues posed by using the monuments as a means of resurrecting Govan Old made it clear that the 'multiple lives' concept applied equally to historic buildings and places. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that Govan Old's next life is beginning.

Acknowledgements

This seems like a suitable place to record publicly the debts I have accumulated over many years of working in Govan. Tom Davidson Kelly provided the initial invitation to excavate and continues to supply encouragement and guidance in equal measures. Just as important he introduced me to the Govan congregation and the Friends of Govan Old, who have done remarkable work keeping the place alive in very trying circumstances. Pat Cassidy of Govan Workspace has made the idea of the Govan Stones project a reality and has given me the rare opportunity to translate academic interests into a tangible cultural benefit. David Robertson, the champion of adaptive reuse of Glasgow's Gothic revival churches, has ensured that the building was not overlooked. Ingrid Shearer, a long-term collaborator in exploring Govan's archaeology, has led the way in linking archaeology with meaningful artistic engagement. Finally, over the years Katherine Forsyth has supported and enhanced my work. None of them is responsible for any errors or misunderstanding that might be found here, but all are guilty of providing inspiration.

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